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Engaging Communities in the Work of DCFS

As the nation’s largest child protective services agency, the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) supervises approximately 35,000 children, roughly half of whom are living with resource families such as relatives or foster parents. The number one mission of the department is clear: to keep children safe. How to achieve that goal is complicated, high stakes for all children and families involved, and at times, defined by horrific and rare tragedies. As a result, for many years, the department has juggled many priorities.

In response to the need for increased focus and clear direction, DCFS has initiated the development of a new vision and strategic plan. As part of this effort, DCFS Director Bobby Cagle has identified five key investment areas:

- Children and Youth
- Families
- Community and Cross-Systems Integration
- Workforce Development

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Kuehl	_____
Barger	_____
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- Performance and Accountability

To truly partner with communities and build trust with children and families, it is critical that DCFS engage with them in their neighborhoods. To achieve this, DCFS will be launching a series of intensive Community Engagement Forums, one in each Service Planning Area (SPA). Forums will provide opportunities for critical stakeholders to better understand how they can receive and provide support and foster positive working relationships with an organization as large and complex as DCFS. Target audiences for the Forums may include but are not limited to:

- Youth and families
- Resource families
- Providers (such as Foster Family Agencies and Short Term Residential Therapeutic Programs)
- Faith-based organizations
- Advocates
- Educators
- Law enforcement
- DCFS staff from Regional Offices and Specialized programs
- General public

Acknowledging that each community has unique needs and resources, it is likely that the costs for hosting each forum will vary from region to region. To offset potential costs, DCFS is endeavoring to:

1. Solicit in-kind contributions from local agencies;
2. Work with County department partners and faith-based organizations to provide facilities or other services and supports; and

3. Possibly offer current or former foster youth opportunities to assist in outreach and planning efforts.

In some cases, to maximize the success of DCFS Community Engagement Forums, it is possible that DCFS may need to exceed its existing funding to cover the costs of the Forums.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Delegate authority to the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to spend up to \$195,000 from its existing budget to cover costs related to hosting Community Engagement Forums in each SPA. These costs may include, but are not limited to, facility rentals, technical support, food and beverage, interpreting services, and child care; and
2. Instruct the Departments of Internal Services, Parks and Recreation, Public Library, and any appropriate County facilities to collaborate with DCFS in planning and hosting the Forums to minimize County costs and ensure timely (expedited, if needed) approvals for purchase orders, procurement and other administrative and logistical needs in advance of each Forum.